

2.2.3.16 Southern Lake Michigan Coastal Ecological Landscape

General Description

The Southern Lake Michigan Coastal Ecological Landscape is located in the southeastern corner of Wisconsin along Lake Michigan (Figure 2-48). The landforms in this Ecological Landscape are characteristic of glacial lake influence, with ridge and swale topography, clay bluffs, and lake plain along Lake Michigan. Further inland, ground moraine is the dominant landform. Soils typically have a silt-loam surface overlying loamy and clayey tills.



Figure 2-48. Southern Lake Michigan Coastal Ecological Landscape.

Vegetation

The historic vegetation in the northern part of this Ecological Landscape was dominated by sugar maple-basswood-beech forests with some oak while the southern part was dominated by oak forest, oak savanna, and prairies. Wet, wet-mesic, and lake plain prairies were common in this area. Black ash and relict cedar and tamarack swamps were found in this Ecological Landscape.

Today, most of the area is dominated by dairy and cash grain agriculture and intense urban development (Figure 2-49). Only about 8% of the Ecological Landscape is forested. Maple-beech forests are about half of the remaining forest types with the remainder split equally between oak-hickory and lowland hardwood forest types. There are some areas of wet-mesic and wet prairie but only small preserves remain since the landscape is heavily disturbed and fragmented. Because of this isolation, fragmentation, and high level of disturbance, non-native plants are abundant.

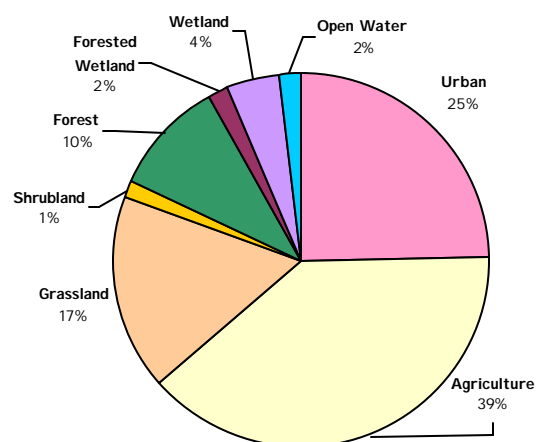


Figure 2-49. Current land cover in the Southern Lake Michigan Coastal Ecological Landscape.

Hydrologic Features

Several rivers cross the Ecological Landscape near Lake Michigan including the Root, Des Plaines, and Pike. The Lake Michigan shoreline is an important ecological area, especially for migratory birds. The watersheds, streams, and lakes of this Ecological Landscape rank as the third most polluted, according to rankings by the Wisconsin DNR.

Land Use

The total land area for the Southern Lake Michigan Coastal Ecological Landscape is 539,824 acres. It has the lowest percent acreage in timberland (8%) of all the Ecological Landscapes. Only 1% is public land (Figure 2-50).

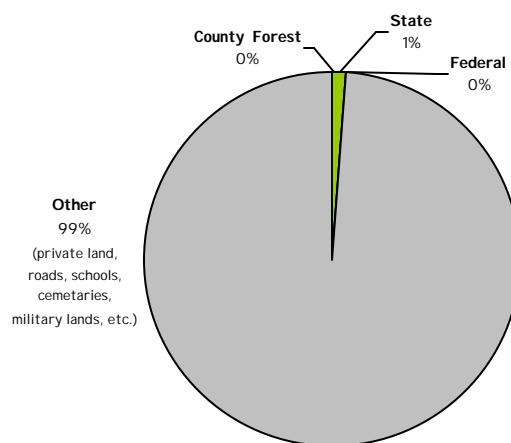


Figure 2-50. Public land ownership in the Southern Lake Michigan Coastal Ecological Landscape.

Socioeconomics

Socioeconomic data are summarized based on county-level approximations of the Ecological Landscape (referred to as a "region"). Economic data are available only on a political unit basis with counties as the smallest unit. The counties included in this socioeconomic region are Kenosha, Milwaukee, and Racine ("Southern Lake Michigan Coastal Region").

The counties of the Southern Lake Michigan Coastal Region are highly urbanized. In spite of this, they have very productive agriculture on farms that are comparatively smaller than the other regions. This region is fourth in total market value of agricultural products and leads in market value per acre of farmland. Unfortunately, the amount of farmland is decreasing rapidly. The region has the highest percentage of farmland sold and diverted to other uses, primarily residential construction. As with agricultural lands, a fairly high percentage of forest land is sold and diverted to other uses each year. The region has low acreage in inland water bodies, as well as the second lowest number of fishery and wildlife areas. Per capita water use is very high in this region.

The Southern Lake Michigan Coastal Region stands out from the other regions for several socioeconomic indicators, especially population attributes and income. Among all the regions, it has the highest population density but has lost the largest percentage of its population since 1970, especially in Milwaukee County. The population density (1,655 persons/mi²) is much higher than that of the state as a whole (96 persons/mi²). It has the highest percentage of people under 18 years old and the second lowest median age. The population of nonwhites, especially African American and Hispanic, is higher in this region than elsewhere in the state. Economically, the Southern Lake Michigan Coastal Region is prosperous for most people. Although the average wage is the highest in the state, the per capita income second highest, and the unemployment rates relatively low, the rates of poverty, especially for children, are quite high. In terms of job distribution, the service sector provides more jobs than in any other region. The relative importance of the agriculture and government sector is close to the lowest of all the regions.

Management Opportunities

- Restoration of the Lake Michigan ridge and swale systems to preserve coastal communities such as lake plain prairies, dunes, and fens that harbor significant concentrations of rare species, including globally rare plants such as those found in the Chiwaukee Prairie.
- Protection of bird migration and wintering habitat along or in Lake Michigan.
- Other communities needing management attention include mesic prairies, bog relicts, the black ash, white cedar, and tamarack swamps of the Germantown Swamp, and the Root River corridor in Milwaukee and Racine counties.
- Urban planning is needed to reduce pressure on important biotic communities and provide the most favorable outcomes for humans to coexist with the natural environment.

Natural Communities

The following table (2-18) lists the natural communities occurring in the Southern Lake Michigan Coastal arranged by the level of opportunity to sustain and manage the community type in this Ecological Landscape. For further explanation of natural communities and opportunities to sustain them, see Section 3.3.

Table 2-18. Natural communities occurring in the Southern Lake Michigan Coastal arranged by the level of opportunity to sustain and manage the natural community type in this Ecological Landscape.

Major Opportunity	Important Opportunity	Present
Wet-Mesic Prairie	Northern Wet Forest	Northern Wet-Mesic Forest
	Southern Dry Forest	Floodplain Forest
	Southern Dry-Mesic Forest	Oak Woodland
	Southern Hardwood Swamp	Dry-Mesic Prairie
	Southern Mesic Forest	Submergent Aquatic
	Southern Tamarack Swamp	Dry Cliff
	Oak Opening	Great Lakes Beach
	Mesic Prairie	Moist Cliff
	Emergent Aquatic	
	Bog Relict	
	Calcareous Fen (Southern)	
	Ephemeral Pond	
	Shrub Carr	
	Southern Sedge Meadow	
	Wet Prairie	
	Clay Seepage Bluff	
	Great Lakes Dune	